

## **SCIENTIFIC CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS' FOREST CONSERVATION PROGRAM**

### **Introduction**

The Forest Conservation Program (FCP) was developed by Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) in 1991 to “help the forest products industry, government policy makers, and the general public bring order to the contentious public debate over management, harvesting, and the conservation of the earth’s forests.” The goal of the Forest Conservation Program is to identify forest management practices that most successfully sustain timber resources while maintaining the ecological viability of the forest and benefiting the surrounding community.

SCS sends independent inspection teams to evaluate company or state forest operations. Each evaluation team consists of experts representing such disciplines as forestry, wildlife biology, hydrology, sociology, natural resource economics, and sustainable resource management. The evaluation team produces a detailed report with valuable feedback and recommendations for individual operators who are interested in maximizing the longevity of their timber resources. High-scoring forests (80 or above on a 100-point index) are certified as “Well-Managed.” In this way, SCS can provide an “independently verified basis for potential marketplace claims.” The program can be applied in tropical, temperate, and boreal forests and plantations, and is open to small and large land holders alike. SCS certification is also available through Chain-of-Custody Certification to manufacturers who produce goods from certified well-managed timber, and to retailers and distributors who merchandise these products. The FCP was accredited by the Forest Stewardship Council in 1995.

As of September 1997, SCS had certified 15 forestry operations and 35 Chain-of-Custody operations. Four additional forestry operations are pending certification. Applicants to the certification programs vary greatly, and include forest managers that produce logs and lumber, distributors, manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers. SCS has certified forests and chain-of-custody operations in North and South America, as well as in Sweden.

### **Recent Developments**

SCS recently initiated a program to evaluate and certify public forestland management units. A pilot project in Pennsylvania was initiated in early 1997 to evaluate about half of the state’s forestland. Due to the success of this program, Pennsylvania has given SCS the authority to evaluate the remaining state forestland. SCS considers state land evaluations to be an emerging field.

SCS has also recently initiated the Consulting Forester and Small Woodlot Certification Program (Small Woodlot Program) to recognize sustainable forest management on small woodlots. The operational steps for evaluation are very similar to those of the FCP; however, the program is

designed to reflect the scope and scale of small, nonindustrial woodlots, usually no larger than 2,000 acres. In this new program, the management practices of a forestry consultant are evaluated on a sample of woodlots that are under the forester's care. Each woodlot being considered for certification must meet the Forest Stewardship Council's Principals and Criteria.

## **Program Summary**

In the in-depth analysis of specific forestland area (management units), SCS establishes an Evaluation Team composed of consultants with expertise in disciplines such as forestry, biology-ecology, economics, wildlife, sustainable resource management, and decision sciences. The summary of the Forest Conservation Program and Chain-of-Custody Certification are explained separately below.

### *Forest Conservation Program*

The process of forest evaluation and certification involves five main steps. In Step 1, SCS and the client plan the evaluation of the forest operation management practices, including its scope and geographic limitations. The selection of an Evaluation Team takes place in Step 2. Although the final decision is made by SCS, the Team selection includes input from the client. Step 3 involves determining the scope of the evaluation, as well as data collection and analysis. According to an FCP fact sheet, the Team "conducts on-site inspections, collects and reviews landowner-supplied records, reviews documents from government forestry agencies and other sources, and conducts interviews with people in the surrounding community."

The Team identifies relevant "importance-weighted" evaluation criteria in Step 4. These criteria are organized into three categories: timber resource sustainability, forest ecosystem maintenance, and financial and socio-economic considerations. Because of the diversity of each site, these criteria and their relative weights differ from operation to operation. Finally, in Step 5, the Team assesses the extent to which the site "meets the underlying objectives and goals associated with each evaluation criterion," and prepares a written report detailing the findings. This report is given to the client for review and feedback to ensure that the client does not disagree with the accuracy of the data, or the veracity of any observations and assumptions. The report is then submitted to peer reviewers for comments on the general FCP methodology and the results of the specific evaluation. Performance is measured on a 0-100 point scale in each of the three main program elements, and SCS provides scoring guidelines that describe a threshold and optimal performance. Forests that rate above 80 in all three categories are designated as "Well-Managed Forests" by SCS. In addition to scoring sites in the three categories, the evaluation can also make non-mandatory suggestions to the applicant to improve the quality of management.

Certification is usually valid for three to six years, at which point a full re-evaluation occurs. The period before re-evaluation depends on the length in years of the applicant's management plan. SCS requires annual on-site audits to monitor the applicant's compliance with stated goals, as well

as to establish an ongoing framework that allows SCS to track issues or concerns raised in the initial evaluation.

The cost of forest certification varies greatly from site to site, and depends on the size of the operation, the geographic location and distribution of the forest areas, and the ease of access. The initial fee is between \$.05-.40 per acre, and annual audits cost between \$2,000-5,000.

### *Chain-of-custody Certification*

Valid chain-of-custody procedures are an essential component to a forest certification program. Chain-of-custody procedures are intended to ensure that products bearing FCP labeling are produced from certified sources and materials. Procedures vary greatly from one production system to another, but SCS has developed basic requirements for the different possible scenarios. Procedures can include assuring that logs bear a tag identifying the forest of origin, segregating certified lumber from other lumber at a secondary mill, and segregating the lumber during transport. The procedures are implemented at key points where the product is transferred, such as when it leaves the forest, arrives at a paper mill, or is delivered to the broker, wholesale dealer, or retailer. The chain-of-custody program certifies that production systems have these procedures in place.

Applicants submit a summary of their processing/sales operations outlining how their operational procedures will incorporate chain-of-custody considerations. SCS reviews the summary to determine whether or not to proceed with an on-site compliance audit. The purpose of the audit is to ensure that the applicant's staff follow the documented procedures, determine if the documentation of activities is sufficient, and review the effectiveness of the system in meeting chain-of-custody requirements. The audit is compiled into a report reviewed by the applicant to ensure that the client does not disagree with the accuracy of the data. If the operations successfully meet chain-of-custody requirements, SCS issues the applicant a certificate. SCS requires annual on-site audits of the manufacturing and distribution process, and can conduct random, short-notice inspections and request documentation related to the product's chain-of-custody.

The fee for a chain-of-custody certification is between \$200-2,000 annually, depending on the size and complexity of the operation.

### **Program Methodology**

The framework and criteria for the FCP and Chain-of-custody Certification were developed through a process of consultation with professionals and experts in the forestry field, and information collected from the literature and independent studies. The FCP's framework was peer-reviewed in the development stages. Because the field of forestry management changes with

technical developments, the criteria and methodology are also peer-reviewed during each evaluation. The criteria are published in the Program Description and Operations Manual.

### **Other Information**

Because small and mid-sized timberland owners are becoming more common, the FCP has developed an evaluation process that accommodates the realities of small owners. In particular, the costs of the evaluation are reduced. The new Small Woodlot Program will also help small businesses.

SCS is following the negotiations and debate over ISO forestry standards, but is not actively participating in their development. Since ISO forestry standards are being developed to provide a certification framework, and the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) provides performance measurements, SCS foresees that ISO and the FSC could eventually work well together.

### **References**

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## **Product Categories**

Wood products

